

Remarks on the National Strategy for Homeland Security *July 16, 2002*

Mr. Vice President and Governor Ridge, thank you all. I want to thank the Members of Congress who have come to discuss the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. We just had a really productive meeting on this important issue. All of us agree that protecting Americans from attack is our most urgent national priority and that we must act on the priority.

I want to thank the Speaker, Speaker Hastert, and Leader Gephardt, as well as Leader Lott and Senator Reid for being here. And I appreciate so very much their agreement that we ought to have a debate about the creation of the Department of Homeland Security on the floor of both bodies before Congress leaves for the August break. These four leaders have shown a strong commitment to get something done on behalf of the American people.

I also want to appreciate—the members of the House Select Committee on Homeland Security are here, Chairman Armey and Vice Chairman Pelosi and other members. Both Republicans and Democrats are charged with reconciling the work of numerous House committees who acted this past week. They face a significant challenge, but I'm confident they'll meet the challenge, because they, too, want to do what's right.

I also welcome Members of the House and Senate who have been long interested in changing the way our Government protects our homeland—Senator Lieberman and Thompson and Collins, Congresswomen Harman and Tauscher, and Congressmen Thornberry, Gibbons, Chambliss, Portman, and Shays. These are members who had an interest in reform prior to September the 11th. They've been working on this issue for a long time, and I appreciate their input and their willingness to stay involved in the process.

I want to thank them for their past efforts. The American people need to know these Members of Congress are working hard and working long hours. And during the next couple of weeks, they'll be working hard to get something on the floor of their respective bodies. And that's good, and that's good for the American people.

There are a lot of tough decisions that will be made as we develop and discuss and debate how to move forward. But I'm confident that Members of both parties and Members of both Chambers know that the security of our Nation is the goal. That's the most important thing that they'll be focused on, is how best to secure the United States.

We also understand that the current structure of our Government is a patchwork, to put it best, of overlapping responsibilities, and it really does hinder our ability to protect the homeland. And so we're working with both parties in both Chambers to effect a strategy that will make it more likely that not only this administration and this Congress can deal with the true threats of the 21st century but, as importantly, future administrations and future Congresses will be able to deal with the threats that will continue to be directed at a nation which loves freedom.

I—right after the September the 11th attacks, I established the Office of Homeland Security in the White House and gave it a critical mission: to produce a national strategy for homeland security. And today I'm sending to Congress our new National Strategy for Homeland Security. This comprehensive plan lays out clear lines of authority and clear responsibilities, responsibilities for Federal employees and for Governors and mayors and community and business leaders and the American citizens.

With a better picture of those responsibilities, all of us can direct money and manpower to meet them.

In the war on terror, the American people are showing tremendous strength and great resolve. Our unity is a great weapon in this fight. And by acting together to create a new and single Department of Homeland Security, we'll be sending the world a signal that the Congress and the administration will work together to protect the American people and to win this war on terror.

Again, I want to thank the Members for their hard work. I appreciate the long hours that they're putting in. I appreciate their love for America and their patriotism during this trying time for our country.

May God bless the American people, and may God continue to bless America.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:30 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Letter on the "National Strategy for Homeland Security"

July 16, 2002

My fellow Americans:

Since September 11, 2001, our Nation has taken great strides to improve homeland security. Citizens, industry, and government leaders from across the political spectrum have cooperated to a degree rarely seen in American history. Congress has passed important laws that have strengthened the ability of our law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute terrorists and those who support them. We have formed a global coalition that has defeated terrorists and their supporters in Afghanistan and other parts of the world. More than 60,000 American troops are deployed around the world in the war on terrorism. We have strengthened our aviation security and tightened our borders. We have stockpiled medicines to defend against bioterrorism and improved our ability to combat weapons of mass destruction. We have improved information sharing among our intelligence agencies, and we have taken important steps to protect our critical infrastructure.

We are today a Nation at risk to a new and changing threat. The terrorist threat to America takes many forms, has many

places to hide, and is often invisible. Yet the need for homeland security is not tied solely to today's terrorist threat. The need for homeland security is tied to our enduring vulnerability. Terrorists wish to attack us and exploit our vulnerabilities because of the freedoms we hold dear.

The U.S. government has no more important mission than protecting the homeland from future terrorist attacks. Yet the country has never had a comprehensive and shared vision of how best to achieve this goal. On October 8, I established the Office of Homeland Security within the White House and, as its first responsibility, directed it to produce the first *National Strategy for Homeland Security*.

The *National Strategy for Homeland Security* is the product of more than eight months of intense consultation across the United States. My Administration has talked to literally thousands of people—governors and mayors, state legislators and Members of Congress, concerned citizens and foreign leaders, professors and soldiers, firefighters and police officers, doctors and scientists, airline pilots and farmers, business leaders and civic activists, journalists